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FM AIT TAIPEI
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 9507
INFO RUEHBJ/AMEMBASSY BEIJING 5014
RUEHUL/AMEMBASSY SEOUL 7734
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO 7596
RUEHCN/AMCONSUL CHENGDU 1158
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RUESLE/AMCONSUL SHANGHAI 8576
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 TAIPEI 001159

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 04/03/2016

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SUBJECT: KMT CHAIR MA AND PRESIDENT CHEN MEET FACE TO FACE

Classified By: Deputy Director David J. Keegan, Reason(s): 1.4 (B/D).

¶1. (C) Summary: KMT Chairman Ma Ying-jeou met with President Chen for a highly anticipated televised "debate" that lasted two hours and ten minutes. Despite all-too-clear political differences and barely concealed disdain, the atmosphere was polite, and both had plenty of time to get their points across. Ma reviewed themes from his recent U.S. visit, including maintaining the "five no's" and developing cross-Straits relations on the basis of the "1992 consensus." Chen challenged the existence of the "92 Consensus," said Ma was "naive" to trust the PRC, and criticized the KMT for obstructing progress on arms procurement. Chen called for constitutional reform; Ma responded that the people want the government to focus on economic issues. Neither leader struck knockout blows with their arguments, and the debate may not have changed many minds in Taiwan's polarized society. However, Ma's arguments that Taiwan should at least try to improve cross-Straits relations to strengthen the economy and reduce tensions may have some resonance here. End summary.

¶2. (C) KMT Chairman Ma Ying-jeou and President Chen Shui-bian met at the Presidential Office on April 3 for what turned into a two-hour and ten minute live-television debate. Ma had requested the meeting immediately upon his return to Taiwan from the U.S. Chen quickly extended an invitation and the time for the meeting was set late last week. Chen was accompanied by Presidential Office Secretary General Mark Chen and Deputy Secretary General Cho Jung-tai. Ma was accompanied by KMT Secretary General Chan Chuen-po and KMT Deputy Policy Director Chang Jung-kung.

¶3. (C) In his five-minute opening remarks, Chen congratulated Ma on the success of his U.S. visit, even though he disagreed with Ma on many important policy issues. Ma reviewed the "five no's" and "five do's" cross-Straits policies he stated while in the U.S. He noted that his "five no's" were the same ones Chen introduced in his 2000 inaugural address (but has repeatedly refused to restate). Ma emphasized that the "92 Consensus," which he defined as "one China, separate interpretations," is the key to closer cross-Straits relations and increased economic opportunities for Taiwan. He urged Chen to accept the "92 consensus" in order to break the cross-Straits impasse. Chen challenged the term "92 Consensus" and argued that China only accepted the "one China principle," not "one China, separate

Interpretations." Chen urged Ma to have Lien Chan ask PRC President Hu Jintao state publicly that the "92 consensus" means "one China, separate interpretations" during his upcoming visit to China, suggesting he would respect the outcome if Hu is willing to make such a public statement.

¶4. (C) Chen said Ma was naive to believe that the PRC could be trusted to honor a 30-50 year interim peace agreement. Chen argued that the status quo should be defined as preserving Taiwan's democracy, liberty, and human rights, and on preserving peace across the Strait. Chen made a pitch for constitutional reform, arguing that changing the constitution is a basic democratic right of the people. Ma urged Chen to focus on the economy, saying Taiwan's voters care about the economy, not still more constitutional changes.

¶5. (C) Chen blamed the KMT for the prolonged arms procurement delay. Ma said the KMT supports reasonable arms procurement, which meets defense needs, is affordable, and is supported by public opinion, and he criticized DPP delays and political issues for obstructing progress on the issue. Ma challenged Chen's decision to "cease the functioning/application" of the National Unification Council/Guidelines (NUC/NUG), saying that the U.S. view is that the NUC and NUG still exist. According to Ma, Chen had accomplished nothing for his efforts to "abolish the NUC/NUG except to cause domestic political turmoil and friction with the U.S. and others." Responding that he had compromised with the U.S. in adopting the term "ceasing," Chen suggested that he was using the term in the same sense as, for example, when saying that an enterprise had ceased to function.

¶6. (C) Comment: Even within the polite framework of this courtesy call as debate, both Chen and Ma managed to lay out

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their contrasting policy orientations. The two also showed their contrasting styles. Chen spoke at length extemporaneously while Ma worked his way through pages of notes. Partisans for Green and Blue will find reasons to proclaim their man the winner. The critical question may be who benefited from a draw.

YOUNG